Perspectives and Imperatives

THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF CURRICULUM STUDIES, 1987: A PERSONAL RETROSPECTIVE

WILLIAM F. PINAR, Louisiana State University

Although reasonable and informed curricularists disagree over why and when the American curriculum field became vulnerable to a reconceptualization, I suggest 1957 as a usable date. Sputnik launched the United States into one of our periodic anxieties over schools and their performance. The Kennedy administration replied by initiating the well-known curriculum-reform movement. To lead this movement, specialists in the disciplines themselves were chosen. That curriculum specialists, those holding advanced degrees in curriculum studies, were overlooked undermined the field’s status, indeed its legitimacy in the overall educational field. Also, by the late 1950s the decades-old expansion of the nation’s school population was ending, and the curriculum graduate student population as well as the schoolchildren population stabilized and began to decline. Of course, there were regional differences as well as temporal ones, but in general, by the late 1960s, curriculum as a field, weakened by neglect from federal curriculum-reform efforts and by declining enrollments, was ripe for an attack.

In 1969, Joseph Schwab, in “The Practical: A Language for Curriculum,” fired the first volley. He identified the field’s apparent demise in its “flight from the practical.” (The Schwabian critique has been pursued by Ian Westbury at Illinois, William Reid at Birmingham, and Michael Connelly at the

---

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Herbert Kliebard shared a sense of crisis in the field, however, his diagnosis suggested that the field had been atheoretical and ahistorical. In 1975, in “The Curriculum Field: Its Wake and Our Work,” Dwayne Huebner proclaimed the field dead, not because of theoreticism or its contrary, but rather because excessive diversity of purpose and an attendant lack of focus and unity. In 1978, giving the first invited state-of-the-art address to the curriculum division of the American Educational Research Association with John McNeil, I declared the field arrested, suggesting that Habermas’s notion of emancipatory knowledge might stimulate movement. Philip Jackson’s 1980 “Curriculum and Its Discontents” ended the decade of attacks. In the seventh year of the current decade, no subsequent critique has followed.

Long before the attacks began, and apart from the reverberations of Sputnik, the curriculum-reform movement, and declining enrollments, several lone individuals, critical of the Tylerian mainstream of the field, worked to legitimize conceptions of curriculum derived from philosophy, aesthetics, and theology. Dwayne Huebner and James Macdonald, the former now gone from our field for theology proper (and currently teaching at Yale Divinity School) and the latter, deceased, worked at the University of Wisconsin (and later the University of North Carolina) to strengthen curriculum’s theoretical base in ways allied with the humanities rather than the behavioral sciences.

---


10 At a 1987 AERA meeting, William H. Schubert suggested that Ralph W. Tyler’s work has been criticized out of historical context and is thus unfair. This point is important and needs to be developed.


(and educational psychology in particular). As a graduate student at Ohio State University in 1969, I was introduced to their work by Paul Klohr, and to the work of philosopher Maxine Greene (whose interests in curriculum were considerable) and to Elliot Eisner, a theorist whose curriculum and evaluation scholarship inspired and were allied with strands of reconceptualist work, but who, like Greene, declined to be affiliated with the movement. At Klohr’s suggestion, I studied with Huebner at Columbia University after leaving Ohio State to teach English at a suburban New York City high school.

In 1973, I invited Huebner, Macdonald, Greene, and others to Rochester, New York, in hope that these dissidents might find common cause. I linked the conference to the notions of cultural revolution and heightened consciousness, notions that make one wince today in their datedness. Yet the conference was an effort to link the ideas of curriculum theorists to developments in the political and cultural spheres, and those efforts continued, indeed became one of the major theormics of the so-called reconceptualist movement. About 150 people from many of the 50 states attended the conference, which Klohr helped me plan and James Doi, then Dean at the University of Rochester (now Dean of Education at the University of Washington in Seattle), paid for. The proceedings, published by McCutchan, still sell steadily, if modestly, today.

The 1973 Rochester conference was the first in a string of conferences that punctuated the intensifying interest in redoing curriculum studies. Yearly conferences are still held, now under the supervision of the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing and the sponsorship of the University of Dayton.

---

14Klohr had invited Huebner and Macdonald to Ohio State University for a 1967 conference. Klohr was the guest editor of the proceedings published in Theory Into Practice, Volume 6, Number 4 (October 1967) The issue, "Curriculum Theory Development: Work in Progress," anticipates the reconceptualization of the 1970s, of which Klohr was a major if unacknowledged architect. For instance, Klohr and I together drew up the speakers’ list for the 1973 Rochester conference. We were co-editors of Curriculum Theorizing (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 1975) until the final few months before publication. A study of Klohr’s pedagogical and theoretical influence is overdue.


16Besides Elliot W. Eisner’s widely read and influential The Educational Imagination (New York: Macmillan, 1985), Eisner collected the papers of the 1969 Cubberly Curriculum Conference (which he chaired), publishing them in Confronting Curriculum Reform (Boston, Little, Brown, 1971). This collection contains James B. Macdonald’s "Responsible Curriculum Development" (pp 120–133) among other noteworthy essays.


18Journal of Curriculum Theorizing is published by the not-for-profit Corporation for Curriculum Research, 53 Falstaff Road, Rochester, New York 14609.
The sequence and sites of the 1970s conferences illustrate the tensions and divisions in the movement.

Almost as soon as the conferences began, internal divisions appeared. These struck me, initially, as at least partly a function of personalities, but I now suppose ideological differences were real and perhaps paramount. In the broadest terms, the divisions were between Marxists of various orientations and interests and those of us interested less in macro-order issues and more interested in the individual. In the early 1970s, autobiography emerged as one means of investigating, and celebrating, the individual. Institutional rivalry also played a part, though a minor one. Generally, the rivalry was between Columbia and Wisconsin on the one hand and Ohio State and Rochester on the other.

For example, the 1974 conference, the second after the 1973 Rochester meeting, sponsored and held at Xavier University of Cincinnati, was chaired by Timothy Riordan, an Ohio State Ph.D. The 1975 conference was held at the University of Virginia, chaired by Charles W. Beegle, an Ohio State Ph.D. Humanistic themes, often focusing on the individual, predominated at these meetings, although political themes were just barely secondary. By 1976, tensions between the two broad groups increased discernibly, partly in response to the book I edited and published and mis-entitled *Curriculum Theorizing. The Reconceptualists.* In that volume, I differentiated between "critical" and "post-critical" theorists, placing the Marxists in the former group and those of us interested in the individual and related concerns in the latter. Of course, the book implied that post-critical theorists were somehow more advanced, psychologically if not theoretically, and it takes little imagination to conjure up the response of Michael W. Apple and the rapidly swelling ranks of Wisconsin- and Columbia-trained Marxists. In 1976, Alex Molnar, a University of Wisconsin Ph.D., chaired the meeting at Wisconsin-Milwaukee (ASCD later published selected proceedings), and political themes predominated. Indeed, many presenters in the ill-conceived post-critical category did not manage to get on the program at all. My only position, for example, was to respond to a major address by Elliot Eisner, an ally in theory I managed to irritate. In 1977, the politically oriented curriculum scholars, as we more neutrally began to depict them, took charge of the meeting held at Kent State University in Ohio—Ohio State territory, you might think, but not so. Richard Hawthorne, a University

---


of Wisconsin Ph.D., chaired the meeting. Although the post-critical group was more adequately represented on the program, the politically oriented group again dominated the conference program and the discussion.

After that meeting, I was determined to regain control of the conferences. To whatever extent this movement would reshape curriculum studies theoretically and methodologically, it could not, if it were to survive, be completely or even primarily identified with Marxist orientations, however crucial these were to the theoretical development of the field. Of course, Apple's contribution was large and growing; Giroux was yet to appear; and clearly one of the major contributions of so-called reconceptualist thought (a term Apple also rejected) was a political critique of curriculum development, evaluation, and other curriculum domains. I suppose I was concerned with just how much "space" (to borrow a post-structuralist term) these series of analyses should occupy, at least on the conference programs. So in 1978, Ronald E. Padgham, a Rochester Ph.D., chaired the meeting at the Rochester Institute of Technology. That same year, I started the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, and the editors of that periodical also undertook the yearly sponsorship of a conference. From 1979 to 1982, the meeting was held at the Airlie Conference Center in northern Virginia. In 1983, the meeting was moved to its present site, the Bergamo Conference Center in Dayton, Ohio, where it is supported by the University of Dayton.

I tried on several occasions to clarify the important point that the term reconceptualist was a misnomer, but the term stuck. I argued in my 1975 volume, which uses this term in the subtitle, that the work of these individuals, while originating in different and often opposing traditions, functioned to reconceptualize the field of curriculum studies. After the events of the 1960s and the critiques of the 1970s, the field was vulnerable to reconceptualization, and the work of Huebner, Macdonald, Apple, Kliebard, and others (such as Eisner and Greene) addressed the atheoretical and ahistorical character of the traditional curriculum field. A more accurate subtitle to that volume would have been simply "The Reconceptualization."22

22Reconceptualist implied a degree of ideological unity that never existed. The reconceptualization was a fragile, diverse coalition of individuals, many of whose interests intersected. The term was accurate in the sense that it conveyed a shared purpose among ideologically diverse individuals in redoing curriculum studies. After the publication of Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists, I critiqued the subtitle in two essays. William F. Pinar, "The Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies," Journal of Curriculum Studies 10 (July-September, 1978) 205-214; and "What is the Reconceptualization?" Journal of Curriculum Theorizing 1 (Winter 1979) 93-104. But the term stuck. The issue of the accuracy of the term reconceptualists aside, its currency and resiliency had mixed consequences. Positively, it helped to create a sense of unity and purpose among those who had been isolated in their respective institutions. Negatively, the term allowed the mainstream to "marginalize" the work of the "reconceptualists," alleging that they were merely a radical, extremist group, ungrounded in and uncommitted to curriculum studies. The Tanners' 1979 statement expressed the views of many mainstream curricularists, see Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner, "Emancipation from Research The Reconceptualists' Prescription," Educational Researcher 8 (June 1976). 8-12.
The Marxists, who were already irritated with me because of ideological differences, became extremely irritated with me, and a self-divided movement was christened, at least conceptualized. To some extent, it succeeded, and to some extent, the American field has indeed been reconceptualized.

The most striking evidence of the reconceptualization is visible in the programs of the annual meetings of American Educational Research Association. There the work of many of the individuals whose names are synonymous with the movement is read and discussed. Division B must prove consternating to some of the AERA leadership, since many so-called reconceptualist themes litter the Division B landscape, in particular political, feminist, post-structuralist, phenomenological, and autobiographical themes. Even some of the historical work—for example, Selden’s scholarship—has a political or critical dimension. Since the AERA is an “empirical” social science organization, Division B’s sponsorship of work that often overlaps with the Bergamo conference program supports the idea that the reconceptualization has occurred. The reconceptualist conferences also sponsor non-reconceptualist work, partly because of the success of the reconceptualization and internal developments in the movement.

During the early years, 1973 to 1976, the sense of opposition to the mainstream field defined the movement, but as the reconceptualist literature grew, attention shifted from a critique of the Tylerian tradition to reconceptualist themes themselves. Certainly the major category of theme in complexity of articulation became politically and economically oriented scholarship. The primary scholar in this area is Michael W. Apple. The scope of his achievement is difficult to assess, but clearly it is immense. Both in volume and complexity of this scholarship, and through the work of his many first-rate Ph.D. students, Apple’s contribution to curriculum studies is perhaps greater than any other single individual’s associated with the reconceptualization. Through his elaboration of such concepts as hidden curriculum, hegemony, reproduction or correspondence theory, resistance theory, and others that now form a major element of contemporary curriculum knowledge, Apple alone and with the assistance of his students—among them Landon Beyer, Nancy King, Joel

Taxel, Linda Christian-Smith, Andrew Gitlin, Kenneth Teitelbaum, Jose Rosario, Leslie Roman, and others—have produced a significant body of knowledge.

Second to Apple, and perhaps second only because he has not trained many Ph.D. students, is Henry A. Giroux, who has been remarkably prolific. His work is complex and appeals to some scholars who find Apple's work excessively deterministic. Giroux appears to be more influenced by the Frankfurt School, and his work illustrates the School's dynamism. His elucidation of ideology, culture, resistance, and most recently, with political theorist Stanley Aronowitz, educational reform have become fundamental, perhaps central theoretical statements in the field.

Also, in this general category are Jean Anyon, whose study of working-class and suburban classrooms is well known, and Philip Wexler. Wexler's work falls under sociology and social psychology, but what addresses curric
The feminist perspective, or perspectives, ranks next in importance to the political one, and there are considerable areas of intersection. I would argue (not neutrally, since she was my student) that Madeleine Grumet is making the major contribution in this sphere.9 Her new book, Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching, may prove as influential as did Apple's Ideology and Curriculum in 1979, or Giroux's Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling in 1981. First working with autobiography, then phenomenology and psychoanalysis, Grumet details several dimensions of curriculum experience, specifying the particular configurations that constitute women's experience. Also a former student and colleague, Janet Miller began in autobiography, and her current work preserves an autobiographical aspect as she extends women's voices in her evocation of teaching and learning.40 Joanne Pagano's recent feminist work41 portends much, as does Patti Lather's.42 Florence Krall's autobiographical work sometimes evokes feminist themes.43 There are many voices here, today, these voices, often intersecting with more exclusively political ones, land close to center stage of contemporary curriculum discourse.

The third major category of work is phenomenology, epitomized by the important work of Ted Aoki, retired from the University of Alberta.44 His work depicts both theoretical and curriculum-development project issues from phenomenological perspectives, and his students, working in Canada, the United States, and Australia, are extending this unique and valuable perspective.
tive. Also in this category are Max van Manen,45 editor of the Alberta journal *Pedagogy + Phenomenology*, as well as David G. Smith66 at Lethbridge and Margaret Hunsberger77 at Calgary.

Much work published in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* and presented at Bergamo each autumn falls outside these categories. William Doll's work, first on Piaget, now on Schoen and Priogine, has extended our understanding of epistemological and theory practice issues.48 My own work, spanning autobiography, gender, literary theory, as well as these periodic commentaries on the field, fits in no one category easily.49 Richard Butt,50 at Lethbridge, has worked on theory practice issues and is now working in the area of biography, as has Bonnie Meath Lang and John Albertini (although they are specifically interested in journal dialogue).51 The general biographical category of work overlaps with that done by F. Michael Connelly at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and his students, perhaps most notably Jean Clandinin at Calgary.52 Edmund C. Short's work includes, most memorably perhaps, analyses of the field.53

There is a continuing and developing historical opus, contributed by Kliebard,44 Franklin,55 Selden,66 Kridel,77 and Davis.58 William Reynolds has

---


combined interests in hermeneutics and politics in his critique of literature. James T. Sears articulates important issues of gender, but his work has also investigated aspects of teacher preparations and qualitative inquiry in curriculum. Post-structuralist critiques are advanced most dramatically by Jacques Daignault and Clermont Gauthier at the University of Quebec. Mytho-poetical work, such as that of Ronald E. Padgham, Nelson Haggerson, and related work in other specializations, such as supervision, typified by Noreen Garman at Pittsburgh, also falls outside general categories. William Schubert, has advanced our historical knowledge of the field, notably by his useful and important bibliography, as well as his (with George Posner) genealogical work, now being updated. He has made theoretical contributions in the area of teaching and curriculum, but his achievement in *Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, Possibility* ensures him a significant place in the field. His synoptic text is the first to adequately represent the changing landscape of the


Craig Kridel, "Castiglione and Elyot Early Curriculum Theorists," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 1 (Summer 1979): 89-99

O. L. Davis has collected at the University of Texas a series of recorded interviews with curriculum scholars


Ronald E Padgham's work has moved from the aesthetic (see his essay in section 4 of *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*) to the mythic, much of the latter under the influence of Jean Houston. See Ronald E. Padgham, "Education on the Edges—Creating New Myths for Education" (Paper presented at the Bergamo Conference, October 1985) See also Ronald E. Padgham, "The Holographic Paradigm and Particritical Reconceptualist Curriculum Theory," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 5 (Summer 1983): 132-142


field, and responsible scholars will make it, I suspect, their main text in introductory courses.

So what started as an opposition to the mainstream field and its tradition has become the field, complicated, with several centers of theoretical formation. There is no reconceptualist point of view, or even points of view. Perhaps that sort of formulation made sense when such work appeared to have more in common than it did with the Tylerian tradition, an appearance made possible by the dominance of the traditional field. Evidenced by the composition of the AREA Division B conference programs, by the volume of production of those who had been termed reconceptualists, by the appearance of that work in non-reconceptualist-identified journals such as *Curriculum Inquiry, Journal of Curriculum Studies, Curriculum Perspectives*, and now *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, by its appearance in ASCD yearbooks and occasional publications, and by the support of non-reconceptualist work at a reconceptualist-identified conference (the Bergamo conference), that dominance has passed, although like a disappearing star in another galaxy, it takes some years for everyone to see. To a remarkable extent, the reconceptualization has occurred.68,69

---


This book is appropriate for educators preparing to become curriculum leaders and those already in positions of leadership. It provides the reader with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective leadership in curriculum planning. The book is organized into four sections. The first presents the conceptual tools embedded in the historical and theoretical foundations of the field of curriculum. The second section provides insight into the skills necessary for bringing about curriculum change. The third section deals with effectively managing the curriculum—instructional processes, material selection, implementation, alignment, and evaluation. The final section examines curriculum trends both in subject-matter areas and across the curriculum and concludes with a discussion of adapting the curriculum to the needs of individual learners.

—Gregory J. Nolan

---


66While the academic field of curriculum studies has been reconceived, the major ideas that constitute the contemporary field have yet to make their way to colleagues in elementary and secondary schools. If there is a "second wave of reconceptualization," these schools will be its site.

68A version of this essay introduces William F. Pinar, ed., *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (Scottsdale, Ariz. Gorsuch, Scarisbrick, in press)